

## Searching for Indigenous Alliances: International NGOs of the United States and Canada in the 1970s

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### INTRODUCTION

On September 13, 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This declaration specifies that indigenous peoples have rights to self-determination, traditional lands and territories, natural resources and sacred sites, and traditional languages and customs. While it is a nonbinding human rights instrument, countries are expected to follow these rules in their relations with indigenous individuals and peoples. Although the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand voted against the passage of this declaration, they changed from opposition to support within a few years. President Barack Obama announced U.S. support for the declaration on December 16, 2010.<sup>1</sup>

The UN declaration marks the culmination of efforts by indigenous peoples and their supporters during the three decades previous to passage. In the 1960s and 1970s Native Americans and Native Canadians sought recognition of self-determination and cultural identity from mainstream society and their governments. The resurgence of their activism was related to the development of the human rights regime and

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postcolonial movements in the Third World after World War II. During the 1970s these movements were internationalized, and consequently in 1982 the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) was established within the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Since then indigenous peoples in the world have participated in an extensive discussion of their rights to improve how they are treated under international law.

Recent decades have witnessed an increased interest in the studies of international movements and the human rights of indigenous peoples. In examining modern Native American political history within an international context, Rosier has provided an important perspective on how the Cold War and global decolonization movements influenced Native American movements. Niezen explored the emergence of the concept “indigenous peoples” with the development of the universal human rights regime, especially since the 1950s. He discussed how indigenous peoples strove for greater recognition of collective rights, especially their rights to self-determination. In 2010 Engle analyzed the changing strategy in the transnational indigenous movement of the Americas, from calls for self-determination in the 1970s and 1980s to the use of human rights to protect cultures in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, these studies have not thoroughly investigated the roots of international indigenous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the development of the movement. Why and how did Native Americans and Native Canadians start their international movements in the 1970s? What roles did they play and what possibilities as well as limitations were seen? In this essay I first explore the formation of two pioneer organizations of indigenous peoples: the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC), based in the United States, and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP), based in Canada. Then I focus on the 1977 International NGO Conference on Discrimination against Indigenous Populations in the Americas, held in Geneva. The experiences of these organizations and conference have been recorded in their reports and periodicals as well as participants’ memoirs. Through the analysis of the archival records and published materials collected in both the United States and Canada,<sup>3</sup> the historical significance of these indigenous movements in the international context can be considered.

## I. THE HUMAN RIGHTS REGIME AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Although the United States awarded citizenship to indigenous peoples in 1924, certain tribes and individuals resisted being incorporated into nationhood. In Canada the Iroquois (Cayuga) patriot Deskaheh traveled to Geneva in 1923 to appeal for the protection of his people's sovereignty to the League of Nations through the help of the Netherlands. However, his attempt proved to be in vain, and Deskaheh was not allowed to return to his homeland in Canada. Even after that, indigenous leaders tried to appeal for their rights—to the League of Nations in 1926, and to the UN in 1947.<sup>4</sup>

The creation of an international law of human rights and decolonization was a significant innovation in postwar international law. After World War II, the UN developed a new world order based on a human rights regime through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 and two basic human rights treaties in 1966: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Although article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights pertained to minorities, it applied to the rights of individuals who were members of ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities. In 1957 the International Labour Organization (ILO) established the Indigenous and Tribal Populations Convention (No. 107) to recognize and protect the rights of indigenous peoples. It reflected an integrationist approach that was common at the time. On the other hand, although a law on decolonization was codified in a declaration of the UN General Assembly in 1960, this “self-determination” as decolonization did not apply to internal collectives based on the “blue water” or “salt water” thesis.<sup>5</sup> Thus these instruments generally avoided issues of minority rights as collectives. The “liberal assimilation strain of thinking” assumed that indigenous members or tribes would attain equality and self-government through assimilation and rights of full citizenship. With legacies of colonization, the notion of human rights was based on universalism and integrationism.<sup>6</sup>

In the mid-1960s Augusto Willemsen Diaz, a lawyer from Guatemala, discussed the problems of racial discrimination against indigenous peoples at the UN. A separate study on them was also recommended in a 1970 interim report on racial discrimination. As a result, in 1971 the “Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations” was commissioned by the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention

of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. Although the definition of “indigenous populations” would be often revised later,<sup>7</sup> the Sub-Commission in its preliminary report of 1972 defined them as

the existing descendants of the people who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcame them, by conquest, settlement or other means, reduced them to a non-dominant or colonial condition; who today live more in conformity with their particular social, economic and cultural customs of traditions than with the institutions of the country of which they now form part, under a state structure which incorporates mainly national, social and cultural characteristics of other segments of the populations which are predominant.<sup>8</sup>

A new international concern with indigenous peoples was developing at this time. Discrimination and genocide of the indigenous peoples in South America were matters of special concern in the UN and the international community. At the end of the 1960s, leading support organizations such as the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), based in Copenhagen, and Survival International, based in London, were formed. At a symposium about South America in 1971, a ground-breaking decolonizing statement, the Declaration of Barbados, was produced, sponsored by the Program to Combat Racism of the World Council of Churches.

After the UN declared the years 1973–82 the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, a subcommittee on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Apartheid and Decolonization was established under the Special NGO Committee on Human Rights. It organized a series of conferences on racism and racial discrimination, including the 1977 International NGO Conference on Discrimination against Indigenous Populations in the Americas, which will be discussed later.

Thus, indigenous peoples had a significant opportunity to be represented in the UN, though the NGOs were required to have official recognition and consultative status under the Economic and Social Council of the UN (ECOSOC). Two groups played key roles in the development of the international indigenous movement at the time: the IITC in the United States and the WCIP in Canada.

## II. THE INTERNATIONAL INDIAN TREATY COUNCIL (IITC)

In the 1960s and 1970s, Native American movements commonly representing themselves as “Red Power” emerged with other social types of activism. After World War II, the U.S. government campaigned for a “termination” policy to eliminate Indian reservations and federal trusteeship to assimilate American Indians into mainstream society. As a result, many Indian tribes engaged in a domestic “cold war” with the federal government while the United States waged the Cold War abroad.<sup>9</sup>

The resurgence of Native American movements in the United States and Canada was often based on the existence of treaties that their ancestors had entered into with former colonial powers and with settlers. “Fish-ins” were staged in support of treaty-protected fishing rights of tribes in the Pacific Northwest beginning in 1964. They borrowed the strategy of “sit-ins” from the Black Power movement. The American Indian Movement (AIM), which was established in Minneapolis in 1968, was at the center of much of the pan-Indian political activism during this period. Especially, the 1970s saw a series of significant incidents: the Alcatraz Occupation (1969–71), the Trail of Broken Treaties march on Washington (1972), the Wounded Knee Occupation (1973), and the Longest Walk to Washington (1978), all of which received international attention. Third World independence movements and the ideals of self-determination influenced these protests and ethnic nationalism in Red Power movements.<sup>10</sup>

After these incidents, the U.S. government established a “self-determination” policy by the middle of the 1970s. President Richard Nixon set tribal self-determination as the goal of his administration by abolishing the termination policy. In 1975 the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act was enacted as one of a series of laws designed to improve the lot of tribal nations and Indians. “Self-determination” in this law meant autonomy in managing and implementing the federal programs on the reservations. On the other hand, preservation of treaty rights was most important for Native Americans along with consultation in policymaking and economic self-sufficiency. Treaty rights and the trust status of Indian land were the foundations of tribal sovereignty.<sup>11</sup> While non-native backlash increased domestically, it was important to take a strategic approach to spread an understanding of their cause. Thus Native American activists attempted to appeal for their rights to the human rights regime at the international level.

Jimmie Durham, a Cherokee returnee from Geneva, became a key person in developing an international indigenous network and organizing conferences. Durham was born in Nevada County, Arkansas in 1940 and grew up in Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. After leaving home at sixteen, he worked on farms and became a member of the Native American Church. He served in North and South Vietnam as a soldier in the Marine Corps, and after returning to Austin, he studied at the University of Texas in the late 1960s.<sup>12</sup>

In 1968 Durham visited Geneva to meet a friend and stayed there while his wife worked for the World Council of Churches in Geneva. During the late 1960s and early 1970s decolonization was a significant issue in Geneva, and a number of the African liberation leaders went there to present their cases at the UN. Most important for Durham, a series of critical incidents concerning American Indians occurred at home. He planned a conference on the indigenous peoples of the Americas to be held at UN offices in Geneva and sponsored by some major international NGOs.<sup>13</sup> When he returned to the United States at the time of the Wounded Knee occupation in 1973, Durham met with AIM leaders to propose an international project.

Thus, in June 1974, a year after the Wounded Knee occupation, the IITC was established by AIM at a mass gathering in Wapala on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, South Dakota. Representatives from 97 tribes in the United States and Canada, more than 5,000 people, joined the conference. Almost every traditionalist Sioux leader from 14 U.S. Sioux reservations and from Canada participated. Delegates from Germany, England, France, and Italy were also present.

The aim of this conference was to discuss the strategy of hundreds of treaties between the tribes and the United States in the past. In each section, about 35 traditionalists of the tribes and seven specialists in U.S. and international law made speeches. The representatives of Sioux tribes discussed the issue of the Black Hills in South Dakota. The Sioux had long claimed the Black Hills based on the Treaty of Fort Laramie in 1868.<sup>14</sup> As a result of the conference, the IITC was officially established to get recognition in the UN. The IITC symbol of the sacred pipe uniting the hemisphere was chosen by elders and represented the common bonds of all indigenous peoples: spirituality, respect for traditional cultures, and ties to the land.<sup>15</sup> As demonstrated in its name, "International *Indian* Treaty Council," Pan-Indianism was an original slogan of the organization.

For the following six years the IITC was headed by Durham, with Russell Means, an AIM leader, as the spokesperson. The offices in New York and Geneva represented the organization at the UN. The IITC aimed to build international cooperation and a network for promoting the rights of indigenous peoples in the Americas. Its periodical, *Treaty Council News*, called for participation and financial donations to sustain the movement. The IITC was granted consultative status as a nongovernmental organization of indigenous peoples by ECOSOC in 1977. Durham tried to pass resolutions for indigenous rights through the Human Rights Commission and Decolonization Committee. The IITC often acted for specific purposes, and Durham once said, "We can't trust any single country to give us a fair deal." Although it inherited the political culture of AIM, many members of which were involved, the IITC was a separate organization.<sup>16</sup>

After its establishment in 1974, the IITC held conferences in different areas or Indian country through the years. The second conference was held in 1976 at Greenwood on the Yankton Reservation in South Dakota. More than 500 indigenous people attended.<sup>17</sup> The Sioux were from six local families, and most participants came from other states in the United States and Canada. Although the number of participants had decreased compared to the first conference, there were representatives from 90 tribes in North America, Australia, Zimbabwe, and Puerto Rico. They discussed various problems that indigenous peoples were facing in each country and considered the strategies needed to solve them.<sup>18</sup>

In New York, Durham tried to get the UN to sponsor the International NGO Conference on Indigenous Populations of the Americas in 1977. Durham and Means contacted each country's embassy to the UN, though persuading the countries in the western hemisphere was difficult. As mentioned, the study on the problems for indigenous peoples by the UN Sub-Commission initially focused on South America. After the Wounded Knee occupation in 1973, however, the Sub-Commission could not ignore the problems of indigenous peoples in the United States. Durham himself went abroad to get support even though he had no other appropriate staff. As a result of these efforts, the International NGO Conference at Geneva was planned in September 1977 during the session of the UN General Assembly with the support of the UN and many countries.<sup>19</sup>

In order to prepare for this International NGO Conference, the third conference of the IITC was held in June 1977 at Wakpala on the Standing Rock Reservation in South Dakota. The participants were from 67 tribes

in the United States, Canada, Chile, Paraguay, and elsewhere. They discussed the reports and representation for the International NGO Conference. The workshops were held on topics such as “colonialism and genocide,” “sovereignty,” “natural resources,” and “legal suppressions,” while the reports were prepared to submit to the United Nations. Although the number of representatives from the countries in South America was limited, an alliance of indigenous peoples in the western hemisphere was consolidated. The IITC did not specifically discuss the definition of “indigenous peoples,” as it considered Indians in the Americas as typical “indigenous peoples.” The IITC was long led by Means and his cohorts, and it did not follow congressional procedures as did the WCIP. While the movement initially tended to focus on the issues of indigenous peoples in the Americas, it gradually attracted delegates from more diverse areas.<sup>20</sup>

### III. THE WORLD COUNCIL OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (WCIP)

The other organization in Canada was also trying to build native alliances across national borders in the 1970s. The WCIP, established in 1975 and having gained ECOSOC status in 1979, was one of the leading international NGOs of indigenous peoples. The founder of the WCIP was George Manuel.

Born in the Shuswap tribe of the Neskonlith Indian Band in British Columbia in 1921, Manuel grew up during the assimilationist period in Canada. In the 1950s Manuel began to organize the Shuswap and neighboring tribes to improve their conditions through community development. He was influenced by Andrew Paull, the founder and president of the North American Indian Brotherhood (NAIB). Manuel became the president of the North American Indian Brotherhood of British Columbia and the tribal leader of the Shuswap Indian Reserve in 1959 while trying to persuade the provincial and national governments to improve the Native policy. In 1969, however, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau issued a white paper that stated the government’s intention to dissolve the tribes in Canada through a “termination policy.”

Dismayed with this assimilationist policy, Manuel became the president of the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) in 1970. The NIB was an organization for Native rights formed by Treaty/Status Indians in 1968. Although it was originally in financial difficulty, Manuel soon acquired federal funding without political strings attached. Its headquarters was

near the Parliament in Ottawa, and it had a substantial library, information center, and a staff of approximately thirty salaried executive officers. Manuel organized the Native resistance through speeches, conferences, interviews, and strategic meetings.<sup>21</sup>

During the 1950s Manuel had already realized the necessity of international relations between aboriginal peoples. In 1971 he visited New Zealand on one of the Canadian missions to assess policies concerning the Maori and found similarities between the Maori and Canadian Natives. Manuel was impressed with the conditions of the New Zealand Maori and tried to learn their strategy of defending native rights through communicating with indigenous peoples abroad. The following year Manuel visited Australia to examine land issues. He tried to reconsider Canadian national policies by comparing them with those of the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. In 1972 the NIB decided to hold an international meeting of indigenous peoples and to apply for NGO status in the United Nations.<sup>22</sup>

Manuel also sought international cooperation with his counterpart in the United States. He traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with Mel Tonasket of the Colville tribe, the president of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) in 1973. The NCAI was the largest intertribal political organization in the United States. Founded in 1944, its membership consisted of twenty tribes. Tonasket, a member of the American Indian Policy Review Commission, became the U.S. delegate and co-founder of the WCIP. They promised to cooperate in defending Native rights, and the NIB and NCAI signed an agreement to establish technical exchanges. Executive officers and staff members visited each other to develop a better understanding of common situations in both countries.<sup>23</sup> According to Manuel:

No Indian individual, tribe, or group of tribes has the political power and strength that is necessary to pursue change. In that respect Indian people in Canada and the United States are similar to other aboriginal peoples. They also have no political power in their respective countries.<sup>24</sup>

Here Manuel explained his Pan-Indianism.

In 1974 Manuel published *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*, with a foreword by Vine Deloria Jr.<sup>25</sup> Using an autobiographical narrative of his life, Manuel outlined the problems of Canada's Indian policy and his concept of "the Fourth World"—aboriginal peoples deprived of rights and

power. Their cooperation based on common experiences and values was important because the first, second, and even the third worlds could not be relied on.<sup>26</sup> Manuel wrote: “While we identify in many respects with the third world, we are not of their world. We are of the fourth world, the forgotten world of aboriginal peoples locked into independent sovereign states but without an adequate voice or say in the decisions which affect our lives.”<sup>27</sup> After publishing this book, Manuel began to engage in building an international indigenous network. He embarked on trips to meet indigenous leaders in Central and South America, Australia, and Northern Europe.

Manuel thought indigenous participation in the United Nations would change the international, as well as domestic, attitudes toward indigenous peoples. Thus he planned to establish indigenous groups as an international NGO in the United Nations. The NIB gained consultative status as an NGO of indigenous peoples from the UN for the first time in 1974. In April 1974 he held a preplanning conference for aboriginal needs in Guyana, South America. The attendees, representing aboriginal peoples from Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Colombia, and Greenland, discussed plans for an international conference of native peoples to be held the following year.<sup>28</sup> At this conference, a definition of “indigenous peoples” was hammered out by the delegates: “The term indigenous people refers to people living in countries which have a population composed of differing ethnic or racial groups who are descendants of the earliest populations living in the area and who do not as a group control the national government of the countries within which they live.”<sup>29</sup>

The WCIP held conferences in 1975 (Canada), 1977 (Sweden), and 1981 (Australia) before the WGIP meeting in 1982. It was formally established in its first conference at Port Alberni, British Columbia, October 27–31, 1975. The participants totaled about 260, including 52 representatives from participating countries,<sup>30</sup> 135 observers, 25 reporters, and 54 staff members. Significantly, the WCIP included delegates from places such as Australia, New Zealand, and Scandinavia in addition to the Americas. For two days they discussed the common experiences of suppression and discrimination in the workshops. At this time, the WCIP was formally founded by the NIB of Canada (headed by Manuel), the NCAI in the United States (headed by Joe de la Cruz and Phillip “Sam” Deloria), and the Nordic Sami Council. Manuel became the president, and Deloria was chosen as a secretary for the UN. Other founding

executives included the delegates from Panama, Bolivia, Norway, and New Zealand.<sup>31</sup> At the conference, resolutions were adopted concerning economic, cultural, political, and social rights and rights about land and natural resources for indigenous peoples. Above all, the suppression of indigenous peoples in Brazil was criticized. The Brazilian government did not allow Brazilian Indians to leave the country to participate in the conference.

The WCIP sought to raise funds from the World Council of Churches and the governments of Canada and the Scandinavian countries through lobbying. Manuel was active in making contacts abroad by visiting Samiland in Finland and the Scandinavian countries, as well as Mexico and Guatemala in 1976. In February 1977, the WCIP branch of Central American countries was established at the interim conference held in Panama. At the time 26 countries from Asia, the South Pacific, North and South America, and Europe attended the WCIP meeting. Manuel was optimistic about the advancement of indigenous rights because the new American president, Jimmy Carter, had promised to promote human rights around the world. However, the U.S. government soon cancelled the funds for the U.S. branch of the WCIP because of political changes in Central and South America.<sup>32</sup>

The second conference was held in Kiruna, Sweden, in August 1977. Thirty-eight participants decided to call for a universal declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples internationally. Eighteen countries were represented, but the three U.S. delegates were absent because they could not afford to make the trip due to the previously mentioned cancellation of U.S. funds. The WCIP declaration of human rights confirmed the indigenous rights of self-determination and to land as basic principles of legal justice. A resolution about the leadership of the UN defending human rights was adopted.<sup>33</sup> During this time Manuel worked to see a universal declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples become a reality. The UN would take up the cause and begin drafting its own declaration a decade later. In 1979 the WCIP was recognized with NGO status in the United Nations.

According to Douglas Sanders, who served as a legal adviser for Manuel, the WCIP was not a radical organization from its beginning. It pursued indigenous autonomy and self-governance inside Canada while proclaiming the importance of self-determination. In 1976, Manuel wrote:

We desire neither apartheid nor assimilation but participation-participation on our terms. It requires not extinguishment of our aboriginal rights but their preservation. This preservation requires first, the degree of sovereignty and self-determination that will make it possible to control our land base. And second, the re-organization of the political institutions of the country so as to make place for us to sit and bargain with other Canadians and the federal government at the highest levels.<sup>34</sup>

Financially, the international conferences of the WCIP were made possible through funds from the governments of Canada, Guyana, Norway, and Denmark, as well as through donations from church groups and public organizations.<sup>35</sup> It was named after the most influential donor: the World Council of Churches. The NIB could arrange for staff and hold the conference in 1975 with programs for developing indigenous leadership and political skills sponsored by the Canadian State Department. Subsequent conferences in 1977 and 1981 were also financially supported by the host countries.<sup>36</sup>

On the other hand, the IITC tried to exclude grants from federal funds and governmental support. At the time, the financial and organizational foundations of indigenous groups were likely to be fragile, and this sometimes put heavy burdens and tasks upon a few individuals in the organizations. In the United States, however, there was a strong tradition of initiative in the private sector, and the indigenous groups tended to have grants from semigovernmental foundations rather than the national government. The alliance of the WCIP with the NCAI also alienated the IITC, which saw the NCAI as an establishment group. This relationship between the WCIP and the IITC continued into the mid-1980s, when the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples was discussed at the WGIP meeting.<sup>37</sup>

#### IV. THE INTERNATIONAL NGO CONFERENCE ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS OF THE AMERICAS IN 1977

After a great effort by the IITC and the WCIP, the International Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Conference on Indigenous Populations of the Americas was held at the UN offices in Geneva from September 20 to 23, 1977. It was a turning point for the indigenous movement because it marked the beginning of direct action in the international area. While the conference was initiated by the IITC, it was organized

by the NGO Sub-Committee on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Apartheid, and Colonialism, a part of the Special NGO Committee on Human Rights that was based in Geneva. Because of his experiences in Geneva, Durham played an important role as an intermediary between indigenous peoples and the UN.

The conference was made up of a broadly based, influential group of international NGOs. More than 250 delegates, observers, and guests attended. Indigenous participants from more than 60 nations and peoples came from the following 15 countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Suriname, the United States, and Venezuela. Also attending were representatives of more than 50 international NGOs, members of UN agencies, and observers from 27 member states of the United Nations.<sup>38</sup>

The U.S. government expressed support for U.S. participation at the conference. While the Carter administration, unlike those of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, was indifferent to the domestic issues of Native Americans,<sup>39</sup> it claimed to champion international human rights and promoted a human rights agenda in Latin America.<sup>40</sup> President Carter also signed the two basic human rights treaties of 1966, the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, though the U.S. Senate never ratified the latter. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, with article 1 about self-determination for “all peoples” and article 27 about the rights of minority individuals, would be the foundation for negotiating the draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The first day of the conference began with a Lakota Pipe ceremony, and several delegates made opening presentations as principal speakers. Oren Lyons, from the Iroquois Confederacy, addressed the duty of all human beings to respect not only “human rights” but also the rights of all the beings of Creation. José Mendoza, a Guaymí from Panama, explained how the Guaymí and other Indian nations became peasants, losing all identity as they were absorbed and exploited. Juan Condori, an Aymara from Bolivia, said that while the Indians were a majority in his country, they suffered from humiliation and extreme poverty without their own lands. Means, a Lakota from the United States and the spokesperson for the IITC, criticized the exploitation of the natural world and sacred Mother Earth by multinational corporations. Phillip Deere, a

Muskogee-Creek Indian from the United States spoke about Native American identity and experience under colonialism.<sup>41</sup>

At the conference, over a hundred representatives testified about indigenous issues: human rights abuses such as repression and genocide, as well as the effects of development projects and exploitation of natural resources. This was the first time that indigenous people could testify on their own behalf at the UN. They gave firsthand accounts of the conditions of indigenous peoples, mainly resulting from their relations with states. However, some representatives from Latin American countries were prevented by their governments from attending.

At the same time, the differences in views and opinions among participants were revealed during the sessions. Niall MacDermot, who presided over the law committee, often intervened in the testimonies of the indigenous representatives by pointing out the need for “objectivity” and “consensus,” which invited criticism from the indigenous delegates.<sup>42</sup> The IITC tried to keep the WCIP out of the conference partly because of their cold relations. In one instance, when Manuel was present as the leader of the NIB, he was ignored when he tried to speak as the representative of the WCIP.<sup>43</sup> Although there were incidents among the attendees, the conference was a great success because it added the collective voice of indigenous peoples to the international human rights movement.

The following statement was included in the final resolution of the conference:

The representatives of the indigenous peoples gave evidence to the international community of the ways in which discrimination, genocide and ethnocide operated. While the situation may vary from country to country, the roots are common to all: they include the brutal colonization to open the way for the plunder of their land and resources by commercial interests seeking maximum profits; the massacres of millions of native peoples for centuries and the continuous grabbing of their land which deprives them of the possibility of developing their own resources and means of livelihood; the denial of self-determination of indigenous nations and peoples destroying their traditional value system and their social and cultural fabric. The evidence pointed to the continuation of this oppression resulting in the further destruction of the indigenous nations.<sup>44</sup>

The conference recommended a program of action that would help protect the rights of indigenous peoples. It included a call for respect for

traditional law and customs, communal land ownership, and indigenous control over natural resources in their own territories. International as well as national laws were expected to recognize and protect these practices. The conference also requested governments of all the countries of the western hemisphere to ratify the Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations' human rights conventions.<sup>45</sup>

The indigenous representatives participating in the conference produced the Draft Declaration of Principles for the Defense of the Indigenous Nations and Peoples of the Western Hemisphere.<sup>46</sup> Article 1 states that indigenous nations should be recognized as independent legal subjects in international law; and, based on this, article 7 declares indigenous nations or groups to have the right of self-determination. While this declaration was principally based on the ideology of the IITC, it represented the fundamental concerns at the conference. It set the basis for subsequent negotiations in the Commission on Human Rights regarding the question of indigenous peoples. Most important, the establishment of the WGIP was recommended to the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.

The 1977 conference called for increased communication and networking among indigenous NGOs and leaders. After the 1977 conference, the Indian Law Resource Center was founded by attorney Robert T. Coulter (Potawatomi). With the leaders of the Haudenosaunee, or the Six Nations Iroquois Confederacy, Coulter began the work of drafting and proposing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 1976. Since then he has actively promoted the rights of indigenous peoples in the Americas as an issue of international human rights.<sup>47</sup>

After the conference, the study of the UN Sub-Commission was revived. As mentioned, the UN Sub-Commission was originally mandated to prepare comprehensive reports in the areas of discrimination and minorities. Martínez Cobo was appointed to complete the study as an outside expert. However, there were no reports for two years after the first three years of the study, 1973–75. With direct involvement of indigenous representatives after 1977, the study was restarted and completed in 1987.<sup>48</sup>

The issues raised at the 1977 conference led to subsequent meetings. The next year, in the UN Human Rights Commission, Durham of the IITC presented testimony:

Self-determination cannot be realized for Indian people by legislative acts on the part of the very government which is oppressing them. Self-determination and human rights for Indian people in the United States could easily be achieved if the United States would honor its treaty obligations.<sup>49</sup>

Here Durham reconciled indigenous self-determination with universal human rights. The rights of indigenous peoples were endorsed in the 1978 World Conference to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, the indigenous representatives from the Americas gave specific cases of human rights abuse at the Fourth Russell Tribunal, held in Rotterdam in 1980.

In 1979, the left-wing Sandinista movement came to power in Nicaragua, and domestic warfare was triggered in Central America. Indian communities, most significantly in Guatemala, suffered from slaughter campaigns by military regimes during the 1980s. Through their networks and the mass media, international NGOs reported the atrocities and struggles occurring in Central America. The indigenous movement sparked in 1977 turned out to be quite significant in responding to these changing political situations. The WGIP continued to draw greater numbers of indigenous delegates each year. The UN conferences and meetings often promoted networking and mobilizing indigenous peoples with supporting organizations.<sup>51</sup>

On recommendation by the 1977 conference, the International NGO Conference on Indigenous Peoples and the Land was held September 15–18, 1981, at the UN in Geneva. It focused on the issues of indigenous rights and land with a global perspective.<sup>52</sup> After a series of conferences and meetings concerning indigenous peoples, the Commission on Human Rights and ECOSOC finally approved the establishment of the WGIP in 1982. Thus the WGIP, charged with the task of drafting a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, met for the first time in August 1982.<sup>53</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As discussed, Native Americans and Native Canadians began to promote their identities and demands through the Red Power movement of the 1960s, and they continued their efforts by building an international indigenous network in the 1970s. They became increasingly visible actors on the international scene, searching for recognition of their

collective rights. Concerned international NGOs and intergovernmental institutions supported their grassroots campaign. The International NGO Conference in 1977 became a watershed for this movement.

The native alliances that formed to assert their influence were based on political identities as “Indians” and “indigenous peoples.” In the early phase of the movement, they sought Pan-Indianism to empower themselves across the national borders between the United States and Canada, and North and South America. Gradually this identity of Pan-Indianism developed into an “indigenism” that included natives outside the Americas. While the IITC primarily focused on Pan-Indianism in the Americas, as shown in its name, the WCIP approached “indigenous peoples” there and elsewhere, including Scandinavia and Oceania. By discussing and sharing experiences, they discovered common problems they were facing.

At the same time, this process of identification revealed certain differences and gaps among indigenous peoples. The two leading groups, the IITC and the WCIP, were not always in accord concerning the best strategy for promoting their cause at the international level. Above all, there was the North-South gap in the indigenous issues. In North America, indigenous organizations and their supporting NGOs could lobby and consult directly on the international scene without the intervention of states in most cases. At the same time, because of growing domestic tensions, the indigenous leaders from the countries in Central and South America often faced a high risk by attending international conferences for their rights. After testifying before the Fourth Russell Tribunal in 1980, Mayan delegates were murdered on their return to Guatemala.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, “self-determination” did not always mean the same thing among the diverse indigenous peoples. While the existence of treaties was often the legal basis for self-determination in the United States and Canada, indigenous peoples in Latin America had not historically entered into treaties with the colonial powers. Their priorities were the most fundamental human rights to life and security, access to basic goods and services, and secure land rights. Therefore, the international indigenous movement that emerged from North America had certain limitations at the early stage and reflected economic as well as political disparities between North and South.<sup>55</sup>

In spite of these differences and divisions, the pursuit of indigenous alliances initiated by American and Canadian natives was of great significance. The IITC and the WCIP played important roles in developing

the concept of indigenous rights based on human rights in the late 1970s. The IITC initiated the 1977 International NGO Conference so that their voice could be heard worldwide. From 1977 to 1979, Manuel was nominated annually as a candidate for the Nobel Peace Prize by IWGIA for his achievement in leading the WCIP.<sup>56</sup> Each organization helped establish the WGIP, the global forum for negotiating indigenous rights and making their voices heard at the international level. From its beginning in 1982 through the early 1990s, the numbers of delegates from NGOs and states at the WGIP meetings increased dramatically. Although the international conferences were initially attended by indigenous peoples from the Americas, soon those from various countries, including the Ainu in Japan, joined these global networks and fora.

Hence, the international system opened the way for empowering indigenous peoples, that is, drawing them out of their domestic powerlessness.<sup>57</sup> After all possibilities had been exhausted in their countries, the international movement provided a breakthrough to overcome domestic constraints and turn their handicaps into strengths. This process showed the diversification of indigenous peoples' strategies to promote their causes and gain wider support and understanding. By reconciling indigenous rights with human rights, indigenous peoples have helped strengthen the human rights regime in the postcolonial era.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> "Remarks by the President at the White House Tribal Nations Conference," Department of the Interior, Washington, DC, December 16, 2010, accessed April 15, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/12/16/remarks-president-white-house-tribal-nations-conference%20>.

<sup>2</sup> Paul C. Rosier, *Serving Their Country: American Indian Politics and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Ronald Niezen, *The Origins of Indigenism: Human Rights and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Karen Engle, *The Elusive Promise of Indigenous Development: Rights, Culture, Strategy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to the staff members at the Center for Southwest Research at the University of New Mexico, the Xwi7xwa Library at the University of British Columbia, and the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs Resource Centre for their kind support when using materials at their institutions.

<sup>4</sup> Akwesasne Notes, ed., *Basic Call to Consciousness*, rev. ed. (Summertown, TN: Book Publishing Company, 1986), 41–54; "American Indians Speak in Geneva," *Native American Solidarity Committee*, March 1978, 15.

<sup>5</sup> The "blue water thesis" saw the decolonization process only for overseas colonies, not within the territory of independent countries. S. James Anaya, *Indigenous Peoples in International Law*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 54, 75–76.

<sup>6</sup> S. James Anaya, "International Law and U.S. Trust Responsibility Toward Native Americans," in *Native Voices: American Indian Identity and Resistance*, ed. Richard Grounds, George E. Tinker, and David E. Wilkins (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2003), 160–64.

<sup>7</sup> The UN initially tended to use the term "indigenous population(s)" instead of "indigenous peoples." The use of the term "peoples" implies and presupposes the right of self-determination as that term is understood in international law. Over the course of drafting the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, there were long debates about whether the term "peoples" should be included. Alexandra Xanthaki, *Indigenous Rights and United Nations Standards: Self-determination, Culture and Land* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 70–73, 132–36.

<sup>8</sup> "Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations: Preliminary Report," E/CN.4/Sub.2/L.566, June 29, 1972, 10.

<sup>9</sup> Rosier, *Serving Their Country*, 109–220.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel M. Cobb, *Native Activism in Cold War America: The Struggle for Sovereignty* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008); Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Allen Warrior, *Like a Hurricane: The Indian Movement from Alcatraz to Wounded Knee* (New York: The New Press, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Christopher K. Riggs, "American Indians, Economic Development, and Self-Determination in the 1960s," in *Pacific Historical Review* 69, no. 3 (2000): 439; *Treaty Council News* 2, no. 1 (April 1978): 2.

<sup>12</sup> Lucy R. Lippard, "Jimmie Durham: Postmodernist 'Savage,'" *Art in America* 81, no. 2 (February 1993): 62–69.

<sup>13</sup> These organizations included the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Peace Council (WPC), the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), and others.

<sup>14</sup> *Akwesasne Notes*, Early Summer 1974: 4–5; Russell Means, *Where White Men Fear to Tread: The Autobiography of Russell Means*, with Marvin J. Wolf (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1995), 324–25.

<sup>15</sup> Means, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 324; *Akwesasne Notes*, Early Summer 1974: 4.

<sup>16</sup> Lippard, "Jimmie Durham," 62–69; Kathleen Teltsch, "American Indian Council Seeks U.N. Accreditation," *New York Times*, January 26, 1975, 31.

<sup>17</sup> "Second International Indian Treaty Conference," *Native American Solidarity Committee*, July 1976; "Challenge Genocide and Colonization with Truth and Action," *Native American Solidarity Committee*, December 1976, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Means, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 356.

<sup>19</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr., *Behind the Trail of Broken Treaties: An Indian Declaration of Independence* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985; orig. pub. 1974), 267–68; Means, *Where White Men Fear to Tread*, 365.

<sup>20</sup> *Treaty Council News* 1, nos. 4 and 5 (July–August 1977): 1–5; Henry Minde, "The Destination and the Journey: Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations from the 1960s through 1985," *Gáldu Čála: Journal of Indigenous Peoples Rights* 4 (2007): 19.

<sup>21</sup> Douglas Sanders, "Background Information to the World Council of Indigenous Peoples: The Formation of World Council of Indigenous Peoples." Center for World Indigenous Studies, 1980; Peter McFarlane, *Brotherhood to Nationhood: George Manuel and the Making of the Modern Indian Movement* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1993), 127–28.

<sup>22</sup> Sanders, "Background Information"; McFarlane, *Brotherhood to Nationhood*, 155–71.

<sup>23</sup> Rudolph C. Ryser, "The Legacy of Grand Chief George Manuel," Center for World Indigenous Studies, 1995.

<sup>24</sup> "NCAI Signs Agreement with Canadian Indians," *NCAI Sentinel: Bulletin*, July-August 1974: 3.

<sup>25</sup> George Manuel, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (Don Mills, ON: Collier-Macmillan, 1974).

<sup>26</sup> Manuel, *Fourth World*, 4-12.

<sup>27</sup> George Manuel, "An Appeal from the Fourth World," *Native People* (Edmonton), November 12, 1976, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Steve Atencio, "Native American Brotherhood Pres. Plans World Organization of Aboriginal People as Answer to Need for Unity," *Wassaja*, November-December 1974, 13.

<sup>29</sup> Sanders, "Background Information."

<sup>30</sup> Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, Finland, Greenland (Denmark), Guatemala, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Sweden, United States (including Hawaii), Venezuela. The WCIP initially omitted countries in Asia and Africa for practical organizational reasons. Sanders, "Background Information."

<sup>31</sup> WCIP, "The World Council of Indigenous Peoples' First General Assembly, Port Alberni, B.C. Canada, 1975," 4. Manuel remained the president of the WCIP until 1981.

<sup>32</sup> McFarlane, *Brotherhood to Nationhood*, 245; George Manuel, "Report of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, January 20, 1977," 1-6.

<sup>33</sup> WCIP, "The World Council of Indigenous Peoples' Second General Assembly, Kiruna, Samiland, Sweden, August 24-27, 1977," 4-10.

<sup>34</sup> Manuel, "Appeal from the Fourth World," 2-3.

<sup>35</sup> World Council of Churches, IWGIA based in Denmark, Swedish IWGIA, the United Nations Association of Denmark, the Faculty of Humanities at Copenhagen University, the Anglican Church of Canada, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace and Oxfam Canada, and others.

<sup>36</sup> "From the office of the Secretary of the State: Notes for an address by Secretary of State J. Hugh Faulkner to the International Conference for Indigenous Peoples, Port Alberni, BC, October 27, 1975," 9-11.

<sup>37</sup> *Treaty Council News* 1, nos. 4 and 5 (July-August 1977): 7; Minde, "Destination and Journey," 19, 21.

<sup>38</sup> United Nations, Commission on Human Rights, Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, *Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations*, chap. 4, "Other International Action" by José R. Martínez Cobo (E/CN.4/sub.2/476/Add.5), June 17, 1981, 35, accessed June 15, 2011, [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/MCS\\_iv\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/MCS_iv_en.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> George Pierre Castile, *Taking Charge: Native American Self Determination and Federal Indian Policy, 1975-1993* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006), 21-23, 29-30.

<sup>40</sup> David F. Schmitz and Vanessa Walker, "Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights: The Development of a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 1 (January 2004): 113-43; Minde, "Destination and Journey," 24.

<sup>41</sup> *Akwesasne Notes*, December 1977: 6-11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-18.

<sup>43</sup> WCIP, "World Council of Indigenous Peoples Four Year Report (1977-1981)," 7; Minde, "Destination and Journey," 19.

<sup>44</sup> Report of International NGO Conference on Discrimination against Indigenous Populations–1977–in the Americas, September 20–23, 1977, Palais des Nations, Geneva, quoted in United Nations, *Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations*, chap. 4, “Other International Action,” June 17, 1981, 36.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 39–53.

<sup>46</sup> The declaration was based on the following thirteen chapters focusing on indigenous rights: (1) Recognition of Indigenous nations, (2) Subjects of International Law, (3) Guarantee of Rights, (4) Accordance of Independence, (5) Treaties and Agreements, (6) Abrogation of Treaties and other Rights, (7) Jurisdiction, (8) Claims to Territory, (9) Settlement of Disputes, (10) National and Cultural Integrity, (11) Environmental Protection, (12) Indigenous Membership, (13) Conclusion. United Nations, *Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations*, chap. 4, “Other International Action,” annex 4, June 17, 1981, 1–3.

<sup>47</sup> Robert T. Coulter, “UN Declaration sets new agenda for U.S.-Indian relations,” December 16, 2010, accessed July 3, 2011, <http://www.indianlaw.org/content/un-declaration-sets-new-agenda-us-indian-relations>.

<sup>48</sup> United Nations, Commission on Human Rights, Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, *Study of the Problem of Discrimination against Indigenous Populations*, accessed June 15, 2011, <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/spdaip.html>.

<sup>49</sup> “People’s Right to Self-Determination,” *Treaty Council News* 2, no. 1 (April 1978): 2.

<sup>50</sup> WCIP, “World Council of Indigenous Peoples Four Year Report (1977–1981),” 12–14.

<sup>51</sup> Akwesasne Notes, *Basic Call to Consciousness*, 128.

<sup>52</sup> Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, “The First Decade of Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations,” *Peace and Change* 31, no. 1, (January 2006): 67–69; WCIP, “Four Year Report (1977–1981),” 12–14.

<sup>53</sup> After starting to draft the Declaration in 1985, the WGIP finally formulated the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 1994. From 1996 to 2006, the Draft Declaration was further reviewed in an intersessional working group of the Commission on Human Rights.

<sup>54</sup> Akwesasne Notes, *Basic Call to Consciousness*, 71. For the Indian rights movement in Latin America, see Alison Brysk, “Turning Weakness into Strength: The Internationalization of Indian Rights,” *Latin American Perspectives* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 38–57.

<sup>55</sup> Stephen Allen and Alexandra Xanthaki, eds., *Reflections on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (Oxford and Portland: Hart, 2011), 102–20.

<sup>56</sup> McFarlane, *Brotherhood to Nationhood*, 244–46.

<sup>57</sup> Although not many Indian tribes and First Nations could have access to the UN, the following are a few examples. In 1977, Sandra Lovelace, a Maliseet Indian petitioned the UN Human Rights Committee over the treatment of aboriginal women and children in Canada by the government (*Sandra Lovelace v. Canada*, 1977–1981). As a result, Parliament amended a discriminatory section of the Indian Act in 1985 in compliance with the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Anne F. Bayefsky, “The Human Rights Committee and the Case of Sandra Lovelace,” *Canadian Year Book of International Law* 20 (1982): 244–66. In the United States, Mario Gonzalez filed complaints for the Black Hills Claims of the Oglala Sioux tribe with the UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in the early 1980s. Mario

Gonzalez and Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *The Politics of Hallowed Ground: Wounded Knee and the Struggle for Indian Sovereignty* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 170–71. After the Western Shoshone representatives went before the UN panel in 2006, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) acknowledged the U.S. government’s violations of their traditional rights and urged federal authorities to stop all actions on tribal land. “UN criticises U.S. government over Western Shoshone tribe,” *Survival International*, March 15, 2006, accessed November 20, 2011, <http://www.survivalinternational.org/news/1478>.